

And drank anon; noon oother wo he made.
Whan myght is joynd unto crueltee,
Allas! to depe wol the venym wade!

In yowthe a maister hadde this emperour,
To teche hym letterure and curteisye,
for of moralitee he was the flour,
As in his tyme, but if bookes lye;
And whil this maister hadde of hym maistrye,
He makid hym so konnyng and so sowple,
That longe tyme it was er tirannye,
Or any vice, dorste on hym uncwple.

This Seneca, of which that I devyse,
Bycause Nero hadde of hym swich drede,
for he fro vices wolde hym ay chastise
Discreetly, as by word, and nat by dede;
Sire, wolde he seyn, an emperour moot nede
Be vertuous, and hate tirannye;
for which he in a bath made hym to blede
On bothe his armes, til he moste dye.

This Nero hadde eek of acustumaunce
In yowthe agayns his maister for to ryse,
Whiche afterward hym thoughte a greet grevaunce;
Therefore he made hym dyen in this wise.
But natheles this Seneca the wise
Chees in a bath to dye in this manere
Rather than han another tormentise;
And thus hath Nero slayn his maister deere.

Now fil it so that fortune liste no lenger
The hye pryde of Nero to cherice;
for though that he were strong, yet was she
strenger;
She thoughte thus, By God, I am to nyce,
To sette a man that is fulfild of vice
In heigh degree, and emperour hym calle.
By God! out of his sete I wol hym trice;
Whan he leest weneth, sonnest shal he falle!

The peple roos upon hym on a nyght
for his defaute, and whan he it espied,
Out of his dores anon he hath hym dight
Allone, and, ther he wende han ben allied,
He knocked faste, and ay, the moore he cried,
The faster shette they the dores alle;
Tho wiste he weel he hadde hymself mysgyed,
And wente his wey, no lenger dorste he calle.

The peple cride and rombled up and doun,
That with his erys herde he how they seyde,
Where is this false tiraunt, this Neroun?
for fere almoost out of his wit he breyde,
And to his goddes pitously he preyde
for socour, but it myghte nat bityde.
for drede of this, hym thoughte that he deyde,
And ran into a gardyn, hym to hyde.

And in this gardyn foond he cherles tweye
That seten by a fyr ful greet and reed,
And to thise cherles two he gan to preye
To sleen hym, and to girden of his heed,
That to his body, whan that he were deed,
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Were no despit ydoon, for his defame.
Hymself he slow, he koude no better reed,
Of which fortune lough, and hadde a game.

His nevere capitayn under a kyng
That regnes mo putte in subjeccioun,
Ne strengre was in feild of falle thyng,
As in his tyme, ne gretter of renoun,
Ne moore pompous in heigh pre-
sumpcioun,
Than Oloferne, which fortune ay kiste
So likerously, and ladde hym up and doun
Til that his heed was of, er that he wiste.

Nat oonly that this world hadde hym in awe
for lesynge of richesse or libertee,
But he made every man reneye his lawe.
Nabugodonosor was god, seyde hee,
Noon oother god ne sholde adoured bee.
Agayns his heeste no wight dorst trespace
Save in Bethulia, a strong citee,
Where Eliachim a preest was of that place.

But taak kepe of the deeth of Oloferne:
Amydde his hoost he dronke lay anyght,
Withinne his tente, large as is a berne,
And yit, for al his pompe and al his myght,
Judith, a womman, as he lay upright
Sleepyng, his heed of smoot, and from his tente
ful pryvely she stal from every wight,
And with his heed unto hir toun she wente.

What nedeth it of kyng Anthiochus
To telle his hye roial magestee,
His hye pride, his werkes venymus?
for swich another was ther noon
as he.
Rede which that he was in Machabee,
And rede the proude wordes that he seyde,
And why he fil fro heigh prosperitee,
And in an hill how wretchedly he deyde.

fortune hym hadde enhaunced so in pride
That verrailly he wende he myghte attayne
Unto the sterres, upon every syde;
And in balance weyen ech montayne;
And alle the floodes of the see restrayne.
And Goddes peple hadde he moost in hate;
hem wolde he sleen in torment and in payne,
Wenyng that God ne myghte his pride abate.

And for that Nichanore and Thymothee,
Of Jewes weren vanquysshed myghtily,
Unto the Jewes swich an hate hadde he
That he bad greithe his chaar ful hastily,
And swoor, and seyde, ful despitously,
Unto Jerusalem he wolde eftsoone,
To wreten his ire on it ful cruelly;
But of his purpos he was let ful soone.

God for his manace hym so soore smoot
With invisible wounde, ay incurable,
That in hise guttes carf it so and boot,
That hise peynes weren importable;

And certainly the wreche was resonable,
for many a mannes guttes dide he peyne;
But from his purpos cursd and dampnable
for al his smert he wolde hym nat restreine;

But bad anon apparailen his hoost,
And sodaynly, er he was of it war,
God daunted al his pride and al his boost;
for he so soore fil out of his char,
That it his lemes and his skyn totar,
So that he neyther myghte go ne ryde,
But in a chayer men aboute hym bar
Alle forbrused, bothe bak and syde.

The wreche of God hym smoot so cruelly,
That thurgh his body wikked wormes crepte;
And therewithal he stank so horribly,
That noon of al his meynee that hym kepte,
Whether so that he wook or ellis slepte,
Ne myghte noght for styng of hym endure.
In this meschief he wayled and eek wepte,
And knew God lord of every creature.

To al his hoost and to hymself also
ful wlatson was the styng of his careyne;
No man ne myghte hym bere to ne fro;
And in this styng and this horrible peyne,
he starf ful wretchedly in a monteyne.
Thus hath this robbour and this homycide,
That many a man made to wepe and pleyne,
Swich guerdoun as bilongeth unto pryde.

The storie of Alisaundre is so
commune
That every wight that hath
discrecioun
hath herd somewhat or al of his
fortune.

This wyde world, as in conclusioun,
he wan by strengthe, or for his hye renoun
They weren glad for pees unto hym sende.
The pride of man and beest he leyde adoun
Wherso he cam, unto the worldes ende.

Comparioun myghte nevere yet been maked
Bitwixe hym and another conquerour;
for al this world for drede of hym hath quaked,
he was of knyghthod and of fredom flour;
fortune hym made the heir of hire honour;
Save wyn and wommen, nothyng mighte aswage
his hye entente in armes and labour;
So was he ful of leonyn corage.

What preys were it to hym, though I yow tolde
Of Darius, and an hundred thousand mo,
Of kynges, princes, erles, dukes bolde,
Whiche he conquered, and broghte hem into wo?
I seye, as fer as man may ryde or go,
The world was his, what sholde I moore devyse?
for though I write or tolde yow evermo
Of his knyghthode, it myghte nat suffise.

Twelf yer he regned, as seith Machabee;
Philippes sone of Macidoyn he was,

That first was kyng in Grece the contree.
O worthy gentil Alisaundre, alas!
That evere sholde fallen swich a cas!
Empoysoned of thyn owene folk thou weere;
Thy sys, fortune hath turned into aas,
And yet for thee ne weepe she never a teere!

Who shal me yeven teeris to compleyne
The deeth of gentillesse and of franchise,
That al the world weilded in his demeyne,
And yet hym thoughte it myghte nat suffise?
So ful was his corage of heigh emprise.
Allas! who shal me helpe to endite
false fortune, and poyson to despise,
The whiche two of al this wo I wyte?

By wisdom, manhede, and by greet
labour
from humblehede to roial magestee
Up roos he, Julius the conquerour,
That wan al thoccident by land & see,
By strengthe of hand, or elles by
tretee,

But unto Rome made hem tributarie;
And sitthe of Rome the emperour was he,
Til that fortune weex his adversarie.

O myghty Cesar! that in Thessalie
Agayn Pompeus, fader thyn in lawe,
That of thorient hadde all the chivalrie
As fer as that the day bigynneth dawe,
Thouthurgh thy knyghthod hast hem take & slawe,
Save fewe folk that with Pompeus fledde,
Thurgh which thou puttist al thorient in awe,
Thanke fortune, that so wel thee spedde!

But now a litel while I wol biwaille
This Pompeus, this noble governour
Of Rome, which that fleigh at this bataille.
I seye, oon of his men, a fals traitour,
his heed of smoot, to wynnen hym favour
Of Julius, and hym the heed he broghte.
Allas, Pompeye, of thorient conquerour,
That fortune unto swich a fyn thee broghte!

To Rome agayn repaireth Julius
With his triumphe, lauriat ful hye;
But on a tyme Brutus and Cassius,
That evere hadde of his hye estat envye,
ful prively had maad conspiracye
Agayns this Julius, in subtil wise,
And caste the place in which he sholde dye
With boydekyns, as I shal yow devyse.

This Julius to the Capitolie wente
Upon a day, as he was wont to goon,
And in the Capitolie anon hym hente
This false Brutus, and his othere foon,
And stiked hym with boydekyns anon
With many a wounde, and thus they lete hym lye;
But nevere gronte he at no strook but oon,
Or elles at two, but if his storie lye.

So manly was this Julius of herte,
And so wel lovede estaatly honestee,